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O.S.S. Veterans Recall Cloak-and-Dagger Days

By MURRAY SCHUMACH

"All of us old goats" is what Michael Burke called the assemblage of fellow-O.S.S. veterans who got together Tuesday night to plan a reunion dinner of the men—and the few women—who lived the World War II adventures that became so many movie and television scripts and, more important, provided the blueprint for the Central Intelligence Agency.

The men, most of them now gray-haired and baldish, sipped drinks in soft sofas and easy chairs in the board room of Madison Square Garden. They were—these men of the former Office of Strategic Services—the same ones who had parachuted behind enemy lines, stolen secret documents, prepared the way for invading Allied troops, and committed sabotage with the underground forces they had helped to organize.

And, in the manner of men who have shared danger and have outlived even their children's boredom with their adventure stories, they kidded themselves.

The Medal Incident

Thus one member of the committee for dinner-arrangements called out to Mr. Burke, the president of Madison Square Garden Center, who was sitting on the bar, his long legs dangling, that this year the cloak-and-dagger experts would have the William J. Donovan Medal ready in time to present it at the dinner to Robert Murphy, former Ambassador to France. The dinner takes place on May 18 in the Pierre Hotel.

Mr. Murphy, at a clandestine meeting in North Africa with Gen. Mark Clark and French officers, helped design the unopposed invasion of North Africa by American troops in 1942.

The reference to the medal brought chuckles from the former cloak-and-dagger men because it was the code word for one of the most embarrassing incidents in the lore of the O.S.S.

In 1966, when Lord Mountbatten was designated to get the medal, named after the late general Donovan, founder of the Office of Strategic Services, the medal was not available for the dinner, so the resourceful O.S.S. men handed him the medal that had been struck the previous year for former President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Lord Mountbatten glanced at the medal, turned it over and noticed it was for the former Commander in Chief, European Theater. His comment was recalled yesterday by Geoffrey Jones, president of the O.S.S. veterans. Lord Mountbatten said:

"Well, I suppose I will have to give it back and wait for mine."

But beneath the jollity of the meeting was an undercurrent of anger over recent attacks against

"Everyone seems to be forgetting," said one of the men—he asked for anonymity — "that this organization worked for political masters."

Among the O.S.S. operatives were William E. Colby, former Director of the C.I.A., who commanded a group that parachuted into Norway and sabotaged trains during the Nazi occupation.

He was not present at the Garden. But James J. Angleton, who set up counterespionage operations in Italy in World War II and later became head of counterintelligence for the C.I.A., was there.

Mr. Angleton had resigned his C.I.A. post at the end of 1974 and retired after he came under fire for the illegal domestic spy operations he had headed. He was later given the C.I.A.'s highest award.

When asked at the Garden why he had left the C.I.A., he said:

"I resigned on a question of principle regarding the future of counterintelligence and questions relating to Israel."

He refused to elaborate. Almost by instinct, other O.S.S. veterans sidled alongside, explaining that they were prepared to divert any aggressive newsmen. The veterans said they regarded Mr. Angleton as the father of counterintelligence in the United States and a dedicated patriot.

A Note of Seriousness

Mr. Angleton, a tall, stooped man who looks as though he had spent most of his life in libraries, remained quiet for a while.

However, when he was asked about Africa, he expressed disagreement with the opinion of the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Andrew Young, who recently called Cuban forces on that continent "a stabilizing influence."

"The classic cases of stabilization were Hitler's and Stalin's. I do not think the Cubans are stabilizing Africa at all."

This was the only overt intrusion of seriousness in the evening of reminiscences about an organization that included Virginia Hall, who, despite her wooden leg, parachuted into France; John Weitz, the clothes designer, who, in German uniform, operated in the German Army; former Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg; Russian-born Serge Obolensky; Arthur Schlesinger; John Shaheen, president of Shaheen Natural Resources; Henry Ringling

North, and the late Dr. Ralph Bunche.

The sense of irony with which the O.S.S. veterans now view their past was hinted at by Nicholas Deak, now a dealer in foreign currency who parachuted behind enemy lines in the Mediterranean area during the war and then worked in Burma in an operation that involved the capture of Japanese soldiers. When the war ended, he accepted the surrender of the Japanese commandant in Rangoon.

"I still have the sword, of course," he said. "But it's up in the attic."



James J. Angleton, seated, and Nicholas Deak were among those present at reunion on Tuesday.